



MAZOURKA CANYON

THIS HIDDEN CANYON IS YOUR ENTRYWAY INTO THE WILD INYO MOUNTAINS. CLIMBING AMID OLD MINES, CACTUS SPINES AND PINYON PINES, THE ROAD FORMS THE BORDER OF A LITTLE-VISITED WILDERNESS AND BRINGS YOU WITHIN HIKING DISTANCE OF 9,941-FOOT MAZOURKA PEAK.

What to expect: The first 5 miles are paved; the rest is rough and rocky but well-maintained graded dirt. Snow is not cleared in winter and can remain quite deep in the topmost stretch, which is shaded by steep walls and climbs to over 8,000 feet. Also avoid this route if thunder clouds are forming: flash floods are a definite danger here.

Length: 20 miles, one way.

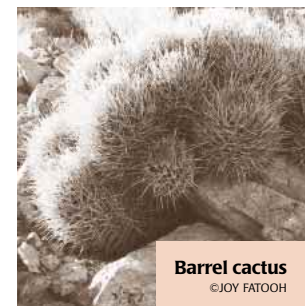
Driving time: about 2 hours, one way.

Getting there: In Independence the route begins at the traffic light in the center of town.

Along the route: Independence was called Little Pine after the nearby creek before adopting its name from the military post two miles to the north. Go south 0.4 miles to the edge of town and turn onto Mazourka Canyon Road on your left (east, toward the Inyo Mountains). Look up to the low point on the crest of the Inyos to see Winnedumah Paiute Monument, a slender 80-foot granite spire that shines silver in the sun. Paiute legend says Winnedumah was turned to stone by an enemy

arrow that flew from the Sierra to the Inyo crest, and now forever watches over his people.

At about 3.5 miles the road drops several feet. This is the fault scarp formed in a huge earthquake on the morning of March 26, 1872. The quake was centered in Lone Pine and would have registered an estimated 8.3 on today's Richter



Barrel cactus
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scale. Here the ground shows some 15 to 20 feet of both lateral and vertical displacement, and a north-south row of trees where groundwater was released along the fault.

As you cross the Owens River you'll enter Bend City. Don't see it? In the early 1860s Bend City and its rival, San Carlos three miles to the north, were the centers of prosperous mining districts. In 1864 Bend City boasted 60 houses, five mercantile stores, two hotels with dining rooms, two blacksmiths, a shoe shop, tailor shop and laundry.

Three years later the adobe buildings were gone. Kearsarge Station is also gone, although you may be able to find traces of the buildings and railroad bed. This was the local station on the Carson & Colorado narrow-gauge line.

As pavement ends the route continues east, then curves northward alongside the mountains. Layers of folded metamorphic rock are reminders of the seismic forces that shaped the nation's deepest valley. Soon the road begins ascending the canyon, narrowing as it climbs. The tall, rangy shrubs are creosote bush, an incredibly durable desert plant that forms clones in an expanding ring. Creosote rings have been dated at over 11,000 years, much older than the oldest living trees, the bristlecone pines at the crest of the Inyos (Route 11). Also look for barrel cactus, whose dense spines provide the plant with cooling shade along with the more obvious forms of protection.

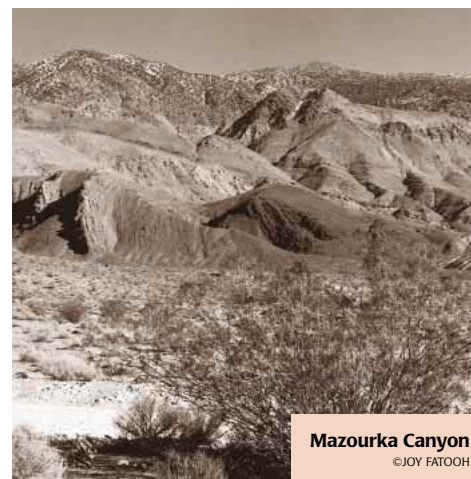
Pinyon pines and juniper trees thrive in the higher, cooler, moister parts of the canyon. Pinyons bear delicious nuts, but not every year; for thousands of years people have traveled many miles every autumn in search of the best crops. So have pinyon jays, flying from mountain to mountain in gregarious flocks, caching nuts in the soil and inadvertently planting the next generation of pines.

Both lode and placer mining claims have been worked in Mazourka Canyon for over 100 years. Tunnels and shafts, many quite dangerous and unguarded, are found throughout the canyon. Bonanza Gulch, a side canyon to the south about 13 miles along the route, and Santa Rita Flat to the north, boomed after a cloudburst in 1894: torrents of water uncovered gold ranging in size from ten-cent to ten-dollar nuggets. There is a signed turn-off for a side road to Santa Rita Flat. If there is snow on the road, we recommend that within the next 3 miles you turn around while you are still able!

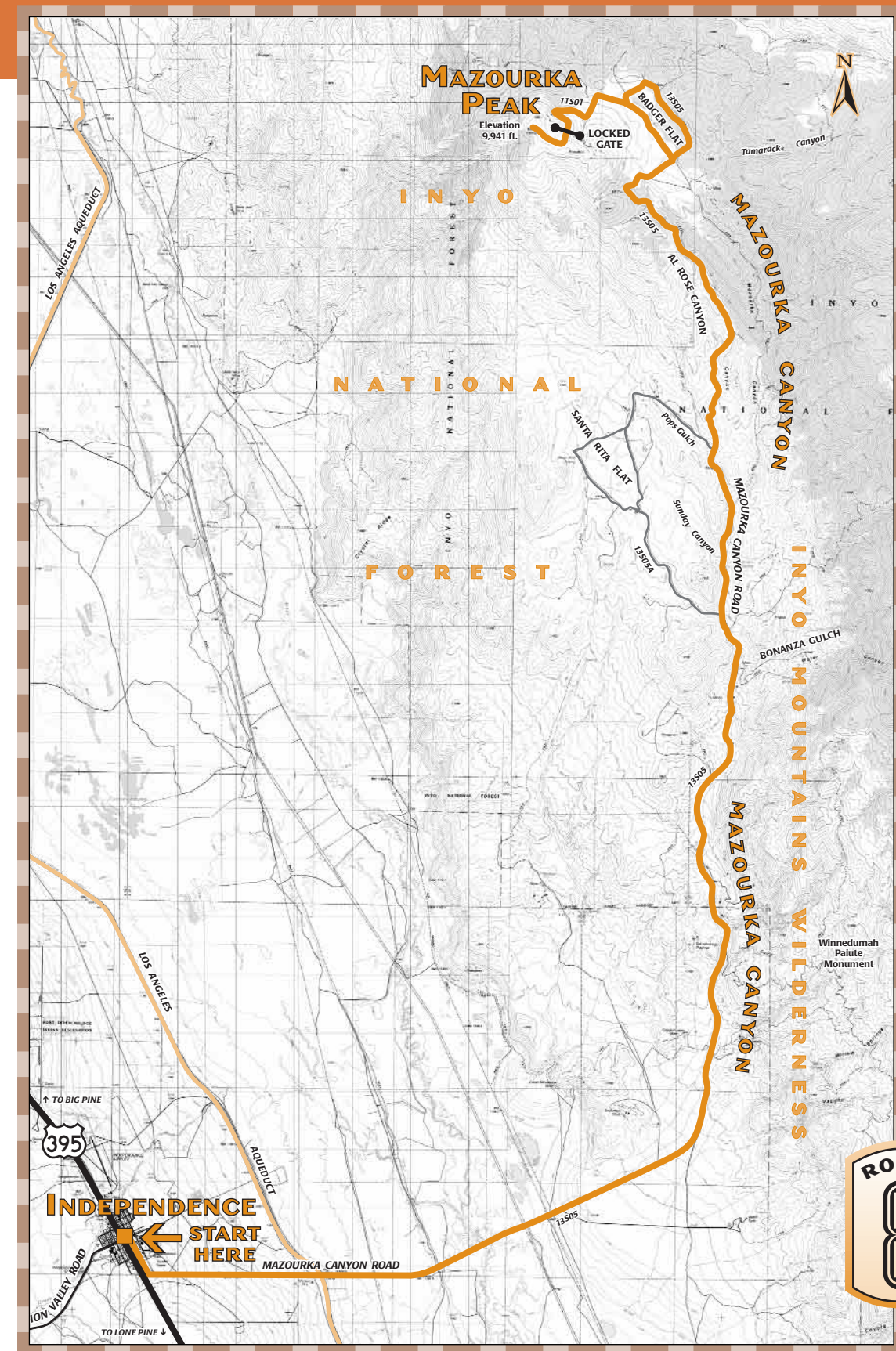
Arriving at Badger Flat, bear left at the fork in the road at 18.5 miles and again at 18.8 onto road 11501. At 19.9 you'll arrive at a high saddle with a fine view of the Sierra. From here retrace your path back onto road 13505. To add a short but adventure-some loop, at 21.1 miles take the middle fork and go south—not uphill to the left, nor back the way you came to the right. At 21.3 bear right at the fork, and again at 21.4 where the view extends far down over Owens Dry Lake and across the valley to the Alabama Hills. Mile 21.8 brings you back to the main road.



Pinyon pine
COURTESY U.S. FOREST SERVICE



Mazourka Canyon
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1 0 1 2 3 Miles

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